

## Annotating a Text: Reading and Reader Response

No educational process is complete until you can apply what you study. In other words, you have not really learned something until you can talk or write about it. This means that you have to go beyond plot summary or stating some underdeveloped opinion. Instead you must deal directly with topical and artistic issues about an individual work.

Writing requires that you strengthen your understanding and knowledge. Before you can write, however, you must perform a close reading of the text. To do so, you need to learn what to look for and know how to look for it. Following the steps below will help you in this endeavor. Not to sound too *Zen* here, but you need to become one with the text...you need to take ownership of it and not look at it like some alien object.

To do this you must become an active reader, which means that you use the margins in your texts to record your thoughts and impressions. These comments will later be used for class discussions and writing assessments over various works of prose. Your objective should be to learn assigned works inside and out and then to say perceptive and intuitive things about them. Using the steps below will help you develop a solid note-taking system from which you can derive as much information as possible from works of literature.

### Annotating Prose (Steps for reading literature and getting something out of it)

1. Notice the title: make notes about your initial reactions at the top of the short story or novel. Return to the title later to discuss its significance.
2. Look up significant words, maintaining awareness of both denotative and connotative meanings. Underline these words, and record relevant meanings. Consider how diction affects tone.
3. Setting: Determine what is happening in the work. Where does the action take place? Who is involved? How might that be significant?
4. Characterization: Who/what is the protagonist? Antagonist? What relationships do the characters have with one another? What does dialogue reveal about the characters? What are the conflicts in the text?
5. Point of View: Consider the speaker not only in terms of a name but in terms of character traits. Is this person speaking to someone or something in particular? (Check the title again for clues.) Make some notes about your ideas.
6. Tone: What is the attitude that the speaker and author each express? Are these attitudes similar or different?
7. Style: what methods does the author use to convey meaning? Short, choppy sentences, flowery language, etc.
8. Figurative language: Look for words or phrases that may be used figuratively (similes, metaphors). Circle or underline them. Consider possible *symbols*—elements that might represent something more than just themselves. Explore for *allusions*—elements that refer to something outside the work. Look them up if you need to. Take notes about these references in the margin.
9. Motifs: motifs are recurring images. Look for patterns (words or images that repeat themselves). How might they add to the meaning of the text? What is their significance?
10. Theme: the overall meaning a work is trying to convey. Theme will always be universal. In other words, a theme is something that an author is trying to teach us through his or her work. Theme can also be a comment about how the author views the world. There can be more than one theme in a given work.